

## East Asia's view of environmental ethics

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## ABSTRACT

The direction of Deep Ecology's 'Look to the East' and its 'primacy of the ontological over the ethical' has initiated a new phase in contemporary environmentalism. It has, at the same time, initiated to look into the non-Western cultures, philosophies and religions to overcome this global crisis *via* eco-spiritualism. Cotemporary environmentalists, including the eco-philosophers, now turn to the East— into its philosophy, religions, and cultures—to overcome the legacy of dualism of man and nature. They apprehend that environmentalism can hardly succeed until the eastern world-view, insights and life-styles are encouraged. In their search for eastern traditions they enter into the depth of religious cultures of Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, and others.

**Key Words:** Environmental, Ecosophy, Ethics, Ecophilosophy.

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## 1. INTRODUCTORY

All the religions of the world have traditionally expressed some ethical concern for the environment and its creatures. They have accorded some moral significance to other creatures, and proposed some ethical responsibilities on the part of humans, although these ethical dimensions are usually secondary, or inferior, relative to responsibilities to other humans. Throughout history, the world's religions have understood the Earth to have some kind of religious significance, or religious value, and that humans have some religious obligations to care for its creatures. These shared ethical concerns are found in historical teachings, and not necessarily in actual religious practices. Greed and destructiveness are condemned, while restraint and protection are affirmed by most religious traditions. For reasons that are complex, controversial, and poorly understood, these religious concerns for the environment faded with the rise of modern society. The development of modern scientific, economic and political institutions have taken the place historically accorded to religion, and traditional religious attitudes toward nature have largely disappeared in modern societies. Over the past few decades, however, some leaders of every religion in the world have returned to their origins to recover their pre-modern religious environmental teachings to present them as religious environmental ethics.

## 2. BUDDHIST ECOSOPHY

Buddhism, one of religious tradition supports an ecological awareness. Many of environmentalist involved in the ecology movement have found inspiration and valuable parallels within the Buddhist tradition, and many Buddhists themselves have drawn out the ecological implications of their tradition. Hence it is said that Buddhism is one of the religion that recognized as being an ecologically aware

religion. Buddhists see the world as conjoined on four levels: existentially, morally, cosmologically, and ontologically (Swearer, <http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/buddhism/index.html>).

## 2.1. Dukkha

Existentially, Buddhists affirm that all sentient beings share the fundamental conditions of birth, old age, suffering, and death. The existential realization of the universality of suffering (*dukkha*) lies at the core of the Buddha's teaching. *Dukkha* is understood as the disharmony between self, society, and nature, thus giving it an environmental interpretation. The ecological crisis comes very close to the state of '*dukkha*,' for it is the result of an egocentric state as well. Insight into the nature of *dukkha*, its cause and its cessation, and the path to the cessation of suffering constitutes the capstone of the Buddha's enlightenment experience (*Mahasacakka Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikaya*) as well as the content of the four noble truths, the Buddha's first teaching. That the Buddha decides to share this existential insight into the cause and cessation of *dukkha* is regarded by the tradition as an act of universal compassion. Buddhist environmentalists assert that the mindful awareness of the universality of suffering produces compassionate empathy for all forms of life. Out of a concern for the total living environment, Buddhist environmentalists extend loving-kindness and compassion beyond people and animals to include plants and the earth itself.

## 2.2. Karma and Its Effect

The concepts of *karma* and rebirth (*samsara*) integrate the existential sense of a shared common condition of all sentient life-forms with the moral dimension of the Buddhist cosmology. Rebirth maps human and animal species on moral grounds. Buddhist regard survival of all species as an undeniable right because as co-inhabitants of this planet, other species have the same right for survival that human being enjoy. Whatever an individual does, their karma will

follow them, because there is always a co-relationship between cause and effect (Dwivedi, 1994: 58).

Although the Buddhist doctrines of *karma* and rebirth link together all forms of sentient existence in a moral continuum, Buddhist ethics focus on human agency and its consequences. Buddhism sees humans neither as a special creation of God, nor does it see them as having been given dominion over 'lesser' species. It says that like all sentient beings, humans also wander in the limited, conditioned realm of *samsara*, the cycle of rebirths. It believes that man influences the environment not only through his actions but also through the moral and immoral qualities of his actions - karmic effects catch up with people via their environment. Thus it is said that if people act unrighteously, it will have an adverse effect on the environment, leading to little rain, poor crops and weak, short-lived people. Right actions have the opposite effect (Bhattacharya, [www.experiencefestival.com](http://www.experiencefestival.com)).

According to Buddhist teachings, the ethical and moral principles are governed by examining whether a certain action, whether connected to body or speech is likely to be harmful to one's self or to others and thereby avoiding any actions which are likely to be harmful. A Buddhists should cultivate good conduct by training in what are known as the Five Precepts. The five precepts are training rules, which, if one were to break any of them, one should be aware of the breach and examine how such a breach may be avoided in the future. The resultant of an action (often referred to as Karma) depends on the intention more than the action itself. Buddhism places a great emphasis on 'mind' and it is mental anguish such as remorse, anxiety, guilt etc. which is to be avoided in order to cultivate a calm and peaceful mind. The five precepts are: 1) To undertake the training to avoid taking the life of beings. 2) To undertake the training to avoid taking things not given. 3) To undertake the training to avoid sensual misconduct. 4) To undertake the training to refrain from false speech. 5) To undertake the training to abstain from substances which cause intoxication and heedlessness.

Buddhism also stressed their principle on social equality. Buddha speak out against the inequalities of the caste system in India. According to him, salvation is attainable by everyone not just those in the more important castes. Salvation comes in the form of knowledge, especially self-knowledge through the elimination of covetousness, craving and desire. Buddha's concerns about the inequalities of the caste system can be seen in a number of ways to relate to ecology. This same concept can be related in many ways to the wealth of the world and how a small portion of the world holds all of that wealth and consumes the majority of its' resources while the poorer (or lower caste) people starve or are seemingly denied resources based on the "natural order" inherent in a caste system. So, Buddhist environmentalists see their worldview as a rejection of hierarchical dominance of one human over another or humans over nature, and as the basis of an ethic of empathetic compassion that respects biodiversity.

The principle of complete honesty and the determination to not hurt another person or animal is also a major tenet in Buddhist ethics. These Buddhist principles fit into the principles of ecology. Complete honesty is needed in ecology so that we do not overlook or downplay the importance of any one part in an ecosystem as complex as the earth. So too is the determination to not hurt another person or animal. By destroying or possibly causing irreversible harm to a species we may be hurting our own future chances for survival.

In the moral continuum of Buddhist karmic principle said that humans have been the primary agents in creating the present ecological crisis and will bear the major responsibility in solving it. The myth of origins in the Pali canon describes the deleterious impact of human activity on the primordial natural landscape. The Buddhist story of first origins describes the negative impact of humans on the earth created by selfishness and greed. It is said that the earth flourishes naturally, but greedy desire leads to division and ownership of the land that in turn promotes violent conflict, destruction, and chaos. In short, in the Buddhist

myth of first origins, human agency destroys the natural order of things. Though change is inherent in nature, Buddhists believe that natural processes are directly affected by human morality (Silva, 1992: 19).

### 2.3. Web of Life

In the cosmological level, Buddhist environmentalists find in the causal principle of interdependence an ecological vision that integrates all aspects of the ecosphere—particular individuals and general species—in terms of the principle of mutual codependence. Within this cosmological model individual entities are by their very nature relational, thereby undermining the autonomous self over against the "other," be it human, animal, or vegetable. In the Buddha's enlightenment vision (*Nirvana*) all the major dimensions of the Buddhist worldview are found. Tradition records that during the night of this experience the Buddha first recalled his previous lives within the karmic continuum; then he perceived the fate of all sentient beings within the cosmic hierarchy; finally he fathomed the nature of suffering and the path to its cessation formulated as the four noble truths and the law of interdependent co-arising. The Buddha's enlightenment evolved in a specific sequence: from an understanding of the particular (his personal karmic history), then to the general (the karmic history of humankind), and finally to the principle underlying the cause and cessation of suffering. Subsequently, this principle is further generalized as a universal law of causality: "On the arising of this, that arises; on the cessation of this, that ceases."

This idea of the interconnectedness of all things finds its fullest expression in the Hua-yen Schools of Chinese Buddhism. In the Avatamsaka Sutra, an important Buddhist text central to Hua-yen School, we find a symbolic representation of reality in the image of Indra's Net. Imagine stretching out into infinite space, in every direction, a network of golden threads. A three dimensional net filling the whole of space. At the juncture of every thread is a sparkling, iridescent, multifaceted jewel. Now imagine we take a closer look at one of these infinite jewels. Looking closely we see that in each facet of the jewel there is a reflection of each and every other jewel in the infinite network... as the play of light sparkles and glimmers in one jewel so that slight change is reflected in each and every other jewel, and that change in each jewel is reflected again throughout the entirety of space.

Although presented in mythic cosmic terms, this image of Indra's net, it is not an image of some far off cosmic sphere, but a symbol for the world we live in moment by moment. It is an attempt to convey the realization that all phenomenon, all things, all beings, are intimately related to each other, intimately interconnected. We are profoundly connected in a web of life and complex social relationships stretching across the globe.

The cosmological vision of interdependent causality evolved into a more substantive sense of ontological unity. Buddhist environmentalists argue, furthermore, that ontological notions such as Buddha-nature or Dharma-nature (e.g., *buddhakaya*, *tathagatagarbha*, *dharmakaya*, *dharmadhatu*) provide a basis for unifying all existent entities in a common sacred universe, even though the tradition privileges human life is spiritual realization. Universally Buddha-nature blurred the distinction between sentient and non-sentient life-forms and logically led to the view that plants, trees, and the earth itself could achieve enlightenment.

### 3. ZEN BUDDHISM

Zen Buddhism has often been seen as disclosing a different, more receptive experience of nature. Instead of imposing predetermined constructs, ideologies, theologies, and worldviews onto the world, it suggests that one can shake up and clean out the eyes, ears, and mind in order to look and listen responsively to things as such in their interdependence and uniqueness. Zen is not a mechanism or theory for resolving every problem. It is not a policy, political program, or general moral theory at all but rather a profound and ecologically insightful response to questions of

the kind of life best worth living. Responsibility is perfected as a natural and effortless responsiveness to things as they are—especially the spontaneous compassion in response to the actual suffering of others.

In Zen, the real solution begins with us. All we have to do is to make our lives fit to the external ideal. No real solution is forthcoming until we come to our senses and turn our attention in the right direction. So, Zen Buddhism strongly suggests that we must first protect the environment from ourselves. The development of the mind and its sense of 'self' is an important step in evolution to attain self awareness. If we think that the problem lies 'out there', then we might also imagine that any solution 'lies out there'. It is like the confused man dashing madly about in search of his head (Yokohama, 1992: 55).

Sitting perfectly still is the Buddhist solution toward the problem. Meditation is a highly practical way of achieving a state of calm in which the seeker perceives reality in perfect clarity. This clarity will lead us to live spontaneous and wise.

Zen practices imply an ethic since they involve the cultivation of character (to the point of the spontaneous realization of no-self) according to a model of what a person should be (awakened, compassionate, and so on). This ethic is a kind of 'virtue ethics', since it differs from ethics defined as obedience to a set of commands or the application of an abstract rule—such as utility or the categorical imperative—governing actions about what one should do. He argues that the Buddhist concern with happiness, since it is oriented toward the flourishing and cultivation of human and sentient life rather than the application of a universal rule.

Buddhist way of life are constitutive and exemplary of such a 'good life' rather than being merely instrumental means to be abandoned upon its realization. One transcends these constituents, abandoning the raft on reaching the other shore, only in the sense that they are perfected and realized. They have become the spontaneity and freedom of a 'second nature' rather than being left behind. Wisdom (*prajñā*) is nothing less than to spontaneously live a deeply compassionate and hence ethical existence. The Buddhist notion of expedient or skillful means (*upāya kauśalya*) does not signify ethical relativism or nihilism but the situation-oriented appropriateness that openly and compassionately responds to things as they are. Compassion (*karuṇā*) is the central virtue or perfection to be cultivated and spontaneously generated. This responsive spontaneity overrides moral rules.

Some criticism have been leveled against Buddhist environmentalists (sometimes characterized as ecoBuddhists or Green Buddhists); scholars who argue that ecologizing the Buddhist worldview distorts the philosophical and historical integrity of the tradition; and, practitioners who see a tendency in Green Buddhism to reduce the tradition to a one-dimensional teaching of simple interrelatedness at the expense of its classical emphasis on the development of spiritual and ethical transformation.

Critics of the ethical saliency of the traditional Buddhist vision of human flourishing argue that philosophical concepts such as not-self (*anatman*) and emptiness (*sunyata*) undermine human autonomy and the distinction between self and other, essential aspects for another-regarding ethic. What are the grounds for an ethic or laws that protect the civil rights of minorities or animal species threatened with extinction when philosophically Buddhism seems to undermine their significance by deconstructing their independent reality as an epistemological fiction? Furthermore, they point out that the most basic concepts of Buddhism—Nirvana, suffering, rebirth, not-self, and even causality—were intended to further the goal of the individual's spiritual quest rather than engagement with the world. They conclude, therefore, either that Buddhism serves primarily a salvific or soteriological purpose or that the attempt to ecologize the tradition distorts the historical and philosophical record.

Buddhist environmentalists respond that Buddhism influenced by an ecological perspective point to the bodhisattva ideal, which teaches that the highest goals of

Buddhism are not personal salvation, but challenge us to embody compassionate awareness and dedicate ourselves to the welfare of all beings from whom we are not essentially separate. Socially engaged Buddhists have realised that in order to be a force for social transformation the traditional Buddhist emphasis on individual moral and spiritual transformation must be augmented to address more directly the structures of oppression, exploitation, and environmental degradation. They recognise that the traits of greed, hatred and ignorance, which Buddhism identifies as the root cause of suffering in the individual, also need to be challenged where they are found embodied in systemic and institutionalised forms. While adhering to the Buddhist emphasis on the practice of mindful awareness and a lifestyle of simplicity, Buddhist activists are applying their critique and practice to specific social and ecological issues.

Other respond that their tradition brings to the debates about human rights and the global environment an ethic of social and environmental responsibility more compatible with the language of compassion based on the mutual interdependence of all life-forms than the language of rights. Furthermore, to apply Buddhist insights to a broad ecology of human flourishing represents the tradition at its best, namely, a creative, dynamic response to its contemporary.

#### 4. SHINTO

**Shinto or kami-no-michi** (way of the deity) is Japan's indigenous religion, the natural spirituality of Japan and the Japanese people. Shinto is characterized by the worship of nature, ancestors, polytheism, and animism, with a strong focus on ritual purity, involving honoring and celebrating the existence of *Kami*. Shinto practices associated with harvests and other seasonal clan events, along with a uniquely Japanese cosmogony and mythology, combining spiritual traditions of the ascendant clans of early Japan.

Shinto has been profoundly influenced by Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. Syncretic interaction with Buddhism, in particular, has been strong historically. It is generally accepted that the vast majority of Japanese people take part in Shinto rituals, while most would also practice Buddhist ancestor worship. Due to the syncretic nature of Shinto and Buddhism, most "life" events are handled by Shinto and "death" or "afterlife" events are handled by Buddhism -- for example, it is typical in Japan to register or celebrate a birth at a Shinto shrine, while funeral arrangements are generally dictated by Buddhist tradition -- although the division is not exclusive.

According to Bernard, it is impossible to consider the topic of Shinto and ecology without making reference to the broader issue of Japanese cultural attitudes to the natural environment. The Shinto beliefs and attitudes toward nature which are relevant to the problem of environmental preservation include three key points. First, great value is accorded sacred space and time, generally as shrines in groves, the boundaries of which are demarcated as distinct from the secular world. The location of Shinto shrines in local landscapes is an important dimension of their sacredness. The second point notes a close relation between nature, deities (*kami*), and human beings. The interactivity of those three is such that human beings also act upon the world they inhabit with nature and deities. Finally, the idea of purification is a key aspect of all ritual activity in Shinto. They are done on a daily, weekly, seasonal, lunar, and annual basis. In many ways these purification rituals are the lifeblood of the practice of Shinto. Purification (*harae*) is performed to reestablish order and balance between nature, humans, and deities (Bernard, <http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/shinto/index.html>).

Shinto highlights evil and sin as defilement or pollution. Neither good nor truth - purity is the highest value in Shinto. In a similar manner neither evil nor falsity, but defilement is the most remarkable anti-value. The idea of purity in Shinto includes good, truth and beauty within itself and its special emphasis is on pure and bright mind and on honesty in interpersonal affairs.

Purification ceremonies counteract pollution (*kegare*). Harm done or accreted pollution can be neutralized by



means of ritual purification. The latter, in particular, is a key dimension of the relationship between the Japanese and nature, which warrants "cultivation" and exploitation of the environment on the one hand, yet which on the other emphasizes the need to rectify imbalances between nature, humans, and deities. Religious belief is not only a matter of thought, but equally of practice. While many Japanese are likely to believe that by virtue of their cultural identity they live in harmony with nature. So Shinto philosophy encouraged people to be one with nature and it will possible only if people lived in tune with nature and not in fear of it. To cultivate a close relationship with nature it was essential to have intimacy, on a one-to-one basis. Life, in Shinto, is considered to be a common element between man and nature.

Shinto also considered that all things of this world have their own spirituality, as they were born from the divine couple. Therefore, the relationship between the natural environment of this world and people is that of blood kin, like the bond between brother and sister. The reason is that an agricultural society based on rice cultivation of Japan cannot exist without unification and harmony among all things on this earth: mountains, rivers, the sun, rain, animals, and plants, not to mention cooperation among people. So, it was natural that people developed the idea that they could make their society flourish only when they worked together, fully performing their own role, but at the same time, helping and supporting each other. This gave rise to the spirit of revering various Kami, the land, nature, people, and, on top of that, the spirit of appreciation of harmony among all these aspects of Nature.

## 5. KAMI

Kami are defined in English as "spirit", "essence" or "deities", that are associated with many understood formats; in some cases being human like, some animistic, others associated with more abstract "natural" forces in the world (mountains, rivers, lightning, wind, waves, trees, rocks). It may be best thought of as "sacred" elements and energies. Kami and people are not separate, they exist within the same world and share its interrelated complexity. The kami reside in all things, but certain places are designated for the interface of people and kami (the common world and the sacred): *sacred nature*, *shrines*, and *kamidana*. *Kamidana* is a small home shrines. There are shrines of natural places called *mori* considered to have an unusually sacred spirit about them, and are objects of worship. They are frequently mountains, trees, unusual rocks, rivers, waterfalls, and other natural edifices.

On the other way Shinto also regards that the land, its nature, and all creatures including humans are children of Kami. The land and its environment as children of Kami. In other words, Shinto sees nature as the divinity itself. Accordingly, all things existing on this earth have the possibility of becoming Kami. Nevertheless, revered status as Kami is limited to those that live quite extraordinary lives beyond human wisdom or power and that have a profound influence, for good or ill, on human beings. As to natural elements or phenomena that have such enormous power, there exist Kami of Rain, Kami of River, Kami of Thunder, Kami of Wind, Kami of Mountain, Kami of Ocean. All these Kami are involved in the life of a rice-cultivating agricultural society.

With the reverence of Kami, Shinto spontaneously developed through the way of life of the ancient Japanese. It has neither written dogma nor a teaching book, but people revere numerous deities who are figuratively described as *yaoyorozu no kami* (8 million different deities). A deity with a female form, Amaterasu Ohmikami, is revered most highly among them, but the idea of one absolute god or a hierarchy among numerous Kami has never existed, and still does not. Yet, each Kami has an individual character to which people offer their worship, believing in that as the virtue of each Kami.

Festivals for Nature for Japanese people called *Matsuri*. There are many kinds of *Matsuri* performed in each locality throughout the year. Large or small, these *Matsuri* are

mostly based on the agricultural cycle. Two of the most important festivals each year are the spring festival called *Kinensai*, a festival to pray for a rich harvest, and the autumn festival called *Niinamesai*, a festival to offer thanks for the successful harvest. People of each locality have been carrying out these festivals every year since ancient times. In this sense, it can be said that Shinto consists of reverence and gratitude to the land, its nature, and the life that these natural elements give to human beings.

## 6. SHINTO'S COSMOLOGY

The Shinto cosmology is certainly not anthropomorphic. Japanese society in general has a relational view of the self – as being not a unique and individualistic essence, but as being the outcome of many forces, relationships and circumstances that shape any particular identity which is in itself dynamic and impermanent. This idea, which arises largely from Buddhism, is shared by Shinto which has as a central notion the permeability of identity. Thus the boundary between human and "nature" is not fixed – animals can be transformed into humans or humans into animals and humans certainly have the potentiality to become *kami* or gods/spirits. Nature in Shinto is thus not separate from humans as in many forms of Western religion and social science and philosophical thinking and Shinto has been variously described as a form of symbolic immanentism (as opposed to transcendentalism), a religious expression of vitalism, as a nature religion well aware of the impermanence of all things, as a sophisticated form of animism and as a deeply world affirming religion or perhaps set of intuitions (there being no fixed scriptures or absolutely defined ceremonial). In these respects Shinto shares many formal characteristics with Hinduism and has also given rise to many celebrated aspects of Japanese culture (Clamer, <http://pipaltree.org.in>). Shinto should be seen the universe not as inert matter, but as thickly populated by spirits or devas, not so much eco-centered but as holistic in its recognition of the whole universe as alive and mutually permeable as all things become or become recycled as everything else and where humans, animals, plants, minerals, mountains and just about everything else form a continuum.

## 7. CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism is a Chinese ethical and philosophical system developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–478 BC). It is a complex system of moral, social, political, philosophical, and quasi-religious thought that has had tremendous influence on the culture and history of East Asia. Cultures and countries strongly influenced by Confucianism include China (mainland), Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam, as well as various territories settled predominantly by Chinese people, such as Singapore. The basic teachings of Confucianism stress the importance of moral development of the individual so that the state can be governed by moral virtue rather than by the use of coercive laws.

The cosmological worldview of Confucianism is rich in promoting harmony amidst change. It is an invaluable perspective for seeing nature as intrinsically valuable and for understanding the role of the human in relation to natural processes as critical. According to Mary Evelyn Tucker, this worldview is characterized by four key elements: an anthropocosmic rather than an anthropocentric perspective, an organic holism of the continuity of being, a dynamic vitalism of material force (*ch'i*, *qi*), and a comprehensive ethics embracing both humans and nature (Tucker, <http://fore.research.yale.edu>).

First, anthropocosmic rather than anthropocentric. There is a moral order of the universe -- "how active it is everywhere! Invisible to the eyes and impalpable to the senses, it is inherent in all things, and nothing can escape its operation." Therefore it abides in man also. He cannot escape it for one instant; "a law from which we may escape is not the moral law. The life of the moral man is an exemplification of the universal moral order. To find the central clue to our moral being which unites us to the

universal order, that indeed is the highest human attainment. The noble natures want to live too high, high above their moral ordinary self.

Second, by "organic holism", the universe is seen as unified, interconnected, and interpenetrating. Everything interacts and affects everything else, which is why the notion of microcosm and macrocosm is so essential to Chinese cosmology. The elaboration of the interconnectedness of reality can be seen in the correspondence of the five elements with seasons, directions, colors, and even virtues.

This holism is the absolute truth in Confucianism, and thus the *absolute truth* is indestructible. Being indestructible, it is eternal. Being eternal, it is self-existent. Being self-existent it is infinite. Being infinite, it is vast and deep. Being vast and deep, it is transcendental and intelligent. It is because it is vast and deep that it contains all existence. It is because it is transcendental and intelligent that it embraces all existence. It is because it is infinite and eternal that it fills all existence. In vastness and depth it is like the Earth. In transcendental intelligence it is like Heaven. Infinite and eternal, it is Infinity itself.

Nature is vast, deep, high, intelligent, infinite, and eternal. The heaven appearing before us is only this bright, shining spot; but when taken in its immeasurable extent, the sun, moon, stars, and constellations are suspended in it, and all things are embraced under it. The earth, appearing before us, is but a handful of soil; but taken in all its breadth and depth, it sustains mighty Himalayas without feeling their weight; rivers and seas dash against it without causing it to leak. The principle in the course and operation of nature may be summed up in one word: it exists for its own sake without any double or ulterior motive.

Third, "Dynamic vitalism" refers to the basis of the underlying unity of reality which is constituted of *ch'i*, the material force of the universe. This is the unifying element of the cosmos and creates the basis for a profound reciprocity between humans and the natural world. Material force (*ch'i*) as the substance of life is the basis for the continuing process of change and transformation in the universe. The Chinese martial arts and medical practices cultivate one's *ch'i* as part of maintaining one's physical and moral health. For many Confucians this meant not only reciprocity with the patterns of nature but also responsibility for the health of nature as well. It was thus critical for the government to support agriculture through irrigation systems as creating the basis for a sustainable society.

Fourth, Comprehensive Ethics. Confucian ethics in its most comprehensive form relies on a cosmological context of the entire triad of heaven, earth, and humans. Human actions complete this triad and are undertaken in relation to the natural world and its seasonal patterns and cosmic changes. In this context humans are biological-historical-ethical beings who live in a universe of complex correspondences and relationships. Heaven, earth, and humans are the basis of all creatures. Heaven gives them birth, earth nourishes them, and humans bring them to completion.

Within this broad cosmological pattern of Confucian thought the person is seen in relationship to others and not as an isolated individual. Thus there are more grounds in Confucianism for emphasizing the common good which is critical for developing environmental ethics. The Confucian tradition stresses the importance of cooperative group effort so that individual concerns are sublimated to a larger sense of the common good (Tucker, <http://fore.research.yale.edu>).

Confucianism ethics starts with the individual. It recognizes the unique importance of the human individual. The individual is regarded as the builder of the state and the empire through the family, he builds by discarding privileges and assuming responsibilities. He achieves this by practising filial piety and thus moves from the condition of inferiority to that of morality; and then practising *Jen* ultimately reaches divinity. The moral life of man may be likened to travelling to a distant place: one must start from the nearest stage. It may also be likened to ascending a height: one must begin from the lowest step.

## 8. TAOISM

**Taoism or Daoism** is a variety of related philosophical and religious traditions that have influenced Eastern Asia for more than two millennia. The word *Tao* literally translated as "path" or "way". Taoist thought generally focuses on nature, the relationship between humanity and the cosmos, health and longevity, and *wu wei* (action through inaction), which is thought to produce harmony with the universe. Tao is also associated with the complex concept of *Ch'i* "power; virtue; integrity", that is, the active expression of Tao. *Ch'i* is the active living, or cultivation, of that "way".

*Wu wei* is a central concept in Taoism. The literal meaning of *wu wei* is "without action". It is often expressed by the paradox *wei wu wei*, meaning "action without action" or "effortless doing". In ancient Taoist texts, *wu wei* is associated with water through its yielding nature. Water is soft and weak, but it can move earth and carve stone. Taoist philosophy proposes that the universe works harmoniously according to its own ways. When someone exerts his will against the world, he disrupts that harmony.

The Taoist universe is one, but infinitely diverse. Its unity is implied by the fact that all dimensions of existence, may be denominated in terms of *Qi* (*ch'i*) the fundamental energy-matter of the universe whose dynamic pattern is a cosmic heartbeat of expansion (*yang*) and contraction (*yin*). So, Tao is a complex of natural principles, methods, way, path and an inexhaustible source. It is indefinable yet spontaneously regulating the natural cycle of the universe, ineffable but present in all things. All things originate from "Tao", and "Tao" is the basis of the existence of all beings.

It is also stated that Tao is the Mother of Heaven and Earth and of Yin-Yang. Man and all other beings are born from the same primordial Breath, so that all beings emanate from Tao and obtain their essence from Tao. All things in the world are inseparable and interdependent. Heaven and Earth are exploited by the myriad beings; the myriad beings are exploited by human beings and human beings are exploited by the myriad beings. If the three forms of exploitation are in harmony, the three types of beings (Heaven and Earth, human beings, and the myriad beings) will be in peace". The notions of Heaven and Earth sharing the same body as human beings" and "Heaven, Earth and Man exploiting each other" represent Taoist concepts of totality.

As nature and man are a harmonious whole and mankind is an integral part of it, man should take into account the eternity of heaven and earth and pass on his ancestors' traditions to the next generations, while assisting Heaven in the process of Creation and Earth in giving Form to beings (Ming, 1960). Man can only survive and develop by being in harmony with his environment. So Taoism advocates to be natural and to do no harm to nature. It tells people to follow the laws of nature and not to "go against its Way." Everything had to be in keeping with the cosmic cycle so as "not to interfere" and to insure universal harmony. In the eyes of a Taoist, Man, Earth, Heaven, Tao and Nature are bound together in an organic chain. In this chain Nature plays a very important role, for everything ultimately abides by Nature. 'Nature' in Taoism means 'to be spontaneous, to be genuine, not to be artificial.'

Taoist religious practices is dealing with the body as the most important field for the interaction of cosmic forces. Properly visualized within the body, gods dwell in their palaces, the constellations of the heavens are made manifest, and a pure and refined *Qi* comes to flow. This bio-spiritual practice is dependent upon traditional Chinese medical theory that views the body as a complex system of interacting energy circuits. Illness, broadly speaking, is symptomatic of some defect of circulation, perhaps a blockage or a seepage or an excess. Religion therefore is not the denial or the overcoming of physical existence, but its gradual refinement to an infinitesimal point. According to this tenet, Taoism opposes the destruction of the natural environment. Daoism considers that man and nature are interrelated and bound by ties of reciprocity and retribution. If man is in agreement with nature, and nature is well treated by human beings, the world will be peaceful and

harmonious, and all things will be prosperous -- a situation beneficial to man. If nature suffers from human beings, it will retaliate against man, causing calamitous suffering and the extinction of species.

### 8.1. Taoist life style

Taoism considers that the orientation of life is to return to simplicity and go back to reality. One should live a simple, quiet and natural life. Daoism believes in a plain and simple lifestyle. It considers that one should not be selfish and have few desires, and one should live a life of plain tea and simple food. Daoism advocates frugality, thinking that contentment with what one has brings happiness, making one's mind peaceful with no troubles (Xia, [www.crvp.org](http://www.crvp.org)). Taoism yearns for spiritual freedom and pursues spiritual satisfaction, free of the burden of material desires.

This ancient Chinese life style of 'simple life' is based on the theory of heaven-man relation. According to this, man lives in nature ("heaven") of which he is a part; thus man and heaven are united. Here the problem of heaven and man is considered in connection with the problem of life, which in turn is intimately connected with the environment. Hence, heaven is significant only for man and serves as the environment for human life. Heaven and man are one in the *Tao*. Human activity in using nature should serve "man's *Tao*". However, this scale of ethical value is made up not according to "man's will", but according to *Tao* as natural law. In other words, man follows the law of nature while observing the criterion of value which is consistent with the law.

Confucianism and Taoism gave different meanings for *Tao*. Confucianism gave it mainly socio-ethical significance, whereas Taoism understood it as nature. According to Confucianism, the criteria of ethical value should be used as norms for nature ("heaven").

Liu Yuxi and Xiong Tzu, another proponents of Chinese thought that says heaven and man are different in *Tao* and hence in function and usage. All things in nature, including man as a living being have definite regularities as regard growth and death. As a social being man is capable of making up ethical criteria and establishing standards of value. Man and heaven function respectively in nature and society; they do not mutually intervene and cannot replace each other. But, there is a connection between the *Tao* of heaven and man's *Tao*, that is to say, man makes use of the *Tao* of heaven for human interests. Therefore, man should refer and improve all things in nature via using natural laws and making them benefit him (Changzhong, [www.crvp.org](http://www.crvp.org)).

### 8.2. Spontaneity

The goal of all higher Taoist practice is to mirror unobtrusively the dynamic spontaneity of one's environment, to become imperceptible and transparent as though one were not at all. This goal is made all the more remote by the complex web of social and intellectual structures layered throughout history that form the cultural flux in which human life is trapped. The path towards pure spontaneity thus consists always in reversion or undoing. This reversion can occur mentally, through sitting in oblivion, physically, through the generation of an immortal embryo, and even cosmogonically, through alchemical practices founded on the principle that degenerative natural processes can be reversed and restored to their pure essential state.

This spontaneous skillfulness of craftspeople cannot be easily taught in words, but is achieved only by the repeated practice of an individual in a highly particular context. Religious practices begin with the purification of mind and body and take for granted the respect for all living beings in one's immediate environment (Miller, <http://fore.research.yale.edu>). The spontaneity of *Tao* proposes a comprehensive and radical restructuring of the way in which we conceive of our relationship to nature and our cosmic environment.

## 9. CONCLUDING REMARK

East Asia's view of Ecosophy covers human behaviour in relation to all living beings and it underpins certain basic virtues, particularly of the benevolent kinds, more specifically, compassion, love, kindness, sympathy, empathy, equanimity and joy in the other's happiness. It is said that human beings are capable of infinite amount of compassion, generosity and gratitude, and that all creatures, great and small, should be the subject of our moral sensibility. The Buddhist codes of ethics is similar to the other eastern Asia ethics, with much emphasis placed on self-control, abstinence, patience, contentment, purity, truthfulness and right attitudes. The treatment of animals and plants in accordance with these principles finds ample references in Buddhist texts, from the earliest monastic codes to the development of Ch'an or Zen Buddhism in China, Korea and Japan. Nature as a whole is not looked upon as antithetical to human needs; rather, everything in nature is capable of making a contribution towards overcoming suffering and the final spiritual end which human beings strive toward.

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